

ploy at any time. Also, calling them up, if they're properly trained and equipped - I don't mean ready to go right away, not ready to go like the reserves of the Marines were, the Marine Reserve in Korea - but ready to go after a fairly good interval of training, sixty day, thirty days, ninety days, or somewhere in that period. Then, I think they can be of great usefulness. I think they might have shortened the Vietnam War, for instance, very considerably, if they had been called up. Always provided, always provided, you've got the country behind you. You've got to have that feeling there's a common goal, a common sacrifice.

I don't think there was any such feeling at the time of the Berlin airlift, frankly.

Q: Now we come, in the same year, to the missile crisis.

Mr. B.: Yes.

Q: Had you recovered from your illness?

Mr. B.: Oh, yes, that was behind me entirely.

The missile crisis I was writing about before it occurred. You recall that the senator from New York -

Q: Senator Keating.

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Mr. B.: - was talking about this at length during the summer. I talked to him and I talked to everybody I could talk to in Washington, including staff members of Senator Stennis' Senate Armed Services Committee, who were following this very closely. And I would get various reports of the Soviet forces in Cuba and report this. There was obviously a very intense attempt in the Pentagon and the White House to control the news and to dampen it. That is, they were quite disturbed about Keating's pronouncements and they were quite disturbed over what they felt sometimes were exaggerated reports.

Kennedy didn't want to be forced, I'm sure, into a situation where he had to do something, nor was he altogether sure of his facts. When he finally was given irrefutable evidence, he took quick and firm action, although, to my mind, it's always been incomplete action. In any case, he handled it much as I guess Johnson did in another situation, Vietnam. He handled it more or less because he felt he had to. He had had the example of the Bay of Pigs, which had done him great damage, and then he had faced Khrushchev in Vienna. In the meantime, he had the Berlin crisis. He faced Khrushchev in Vienna and Khrushchev had been almost insulting to him, as you recall. Kennedy was quite shaken. He felt, as Johnson did at the time of Vietnam, that he just could not afford another loss. So he took quite dramatic and, on the whole, effective action, although I think, in retrospect, this has been over-played greatly. I disagree very strongly with the

impression that has been left that the world was on the verge of nuclear war. I never believed that. I never thought there was anything more than about a 5 percent chance of that, of any missiles being launched, regardless of what we did. We could have invaded the island, we could have bombed it, any of those things, and the Russians would not have retaliated with nuclear weapons. First, they didn't have the power; and, second, they were way out of their orbit. They couldn't bring conventional power to bear in an area where they could have superiority; and, third, because it is just not in accord with Soviet character to take that degree of risk. It was a personal Khrushchev risk-which misfired. He thought he could get away with it because he had cowed Kennedy.

So I never felt that this was anywhere near nuclear war. I thought the real question was whether or not we would succeed in accomplishing all our aims and getting all of the Soviet forces out of Cuba. We didn't really succeed in doing that. We got the missiles out, although there was never any certainty that we got them all out because there was no way of telling. The missiles could be under cover and you couldn't possibly tell whether they were there or not.

I wrote numerous pieces during and after the crisis and got various estimates of the size of the Soviet forces involved. The best estimates I got came from sources with the Stennis committee, which proved to be very accurate in retrospect. The Soviet forces there were much, much higher in number,

much larger, than the administration had ever admitted at the time. They went up to about 40,000 men, although that was, of course, reduced after the missile crisis was over and gradually all of them were withdrawn. But it took over a year before they all left.

I described these forces. They included one armored brigade, which was ready for ground warfare, and a lot of antiaircraft missiles, very formidable ones, and technicians and so on. Then I tried to draw lessons from all this. I studied the intelligence picture as thoroughly as I could and wrote about it. I described the means we had for detecting these missiles and compared our total nuclear strength with that of Russia, which was then overwhelming in our favor. I described how Soviet emplacements in Cuba could effectively threaten all of our east coast.

As I recall it, that's about it.

Q: Did you go to the Pentagon during that time?

Mr. B.: Oh, yes, frequently. I talked to everybody in the Pentagon. Of course, I talked to George Anderson about his famous incident with McNamara. George told me about this. George was already quite worked up because he had had, either then or afterwards, the confrontation with McNamara about the F-111. That was later, I guess.

When George first took office he and I had quite an

argument at one time in his office, because he came in with the idea that he could completely cooperate with the Kennedy-McNamara people and still get his point across. I told him he couldn't. I quickly discovered this myself in connection with McNamara. I'm coming to the McNamara thing a little later. I said: "George, you can't do this. You've just got to be stronger than you are because you're going to be backed into a corner."

He said, "Goddamit, I'm not Arleign Burke. He has a way of doing things in his own way, and I have my own way of doing mine. I'm going to run my shop my own way."

So I said, "That's fine and good, but don't think you're going to be able to get along with McNamara and the Whiz Kids regardless of what you do. You might as well go down with your boots on."

That was a hell of a lot of presumption on my part because he had the responsibility and I didn't.

Q: Was he perhaps banking on his relationship with Kennedy?

Mr. B.: I think so, in part. But in any case it didn't work and you could see what happened gradually coming on. This was particularly true after the incident that he had with McNamara in the command center there, then later with the F-111 when he gave his testimony to Congress.

I started the same way George did, I guess. I mean I